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**Agriculture Officials Solicit Applications for Dairy Farm Relief**  
**Information Sessions Scheduled in Ashland, South Deerfield, and Brookfield**

BOSTON – The state Dept. of Agricultural Resources (DAR) will hold three meetings over the next two weeks to help Massachusetts dairy farmers apply for emergency relief grants. The DAR's first meeting for dairy farmers takes place tomorrow (May 31) at the Massachusetts Farm Bureau in Ashland. Additional sessions are scheduled in South Deerfield on June 6, and Brookfield on June 13.

Gov. Deval Patrick approved a \$3.6 million emergency assistance fund for the dairy industry as part of an FY2007 supplemental budget signed into law May 18. The deadline for eligible farmers to apply for grants from the fund is 4 p.m. on June 22, 2007. DAR Acting Commissioner Scott Soares anticipates that relief checks will be issued about three weeks later.

In January, citing heavy rains that plagued spring 2006 cultivation, low milk prices, and rising energy and feed costs, 165 farmers petitioned the state to declare an emergency in the dairy industry. Acting Commissioner Soares signed a Declaration of Emergency on May 10. The supplemental budget providing the emergency relief funds also established a Dairy Farm Revitalization Task Force to develop proposals to strengthen the Massachusetts dairy industry, which has declined from 829 farms in 1980 to fewer than 200 today. Appointments to that task force, which is charged with reporting by October 1, are imminent.

"We hope the emergency relief payments will keep our dairy farmers on their feet while we work on permanent solutions," Soares said. "The purpose of the meetings in Ashland, South Deerfield and Brookfield is to ensure that everyone who is eligible for this financial assistance understands how to obtain it."

The DAR mailed application packages to dairy farmers last week, and application materials and instructions are also available on the department's web site:  
[www.mass.gov/agr/dairy/legislative\\_relief.htm](http://www.mass.gov/agr/dairy/legislative_relief.htm).

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Farmers are eligible for grants if they produced milk during 2006, held a DAR certificate of registration for at least one month during calendar year 2006, and hold an unexpired certificate eligible for renewal July 1, 2007. The grant application requires farmers to provide DAR with milk production data, as well as authorization to release information relating to that data so that the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture can verify a farm's milk production. Relief payments will be calculated and payments made once all eligible applications have been processed and production data verified.

Dairy farmers who have questions about relief payments, their eligibility or the application process are encouraged to attend one of the information sessions scheduled by the DAR, or to contact the department at 617-626-1700. Details about the grant process will be outlined for farmers at the following lunchtime meetings (all of which run from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.)

- Thursday, May 31 at the Massachusetts Farm Bureau, 466 Chestnut St., Ashland
- Wednesday, June 6 at the Municipal Office Building, 8 Conway St., South Deerfield
- Wednesday, June 13 at Brookfield Town Hall, 6 Central St., Brookfield.

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